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books. Whether this shall be brought about through organized classes, whether it shall be through weekly reading with required reports, or whether it shall be through the subtle influence of the librarian's personality and love of books which inspires and him; or whether it shall be a combination of all these, remains to be worked out by each local institution,—but worked out it must be, unless with our boasted free books, we are to become the by-word and the laughing stock of future generations.

We all acknowledge that the assistant is a most important individual. Have we looked well to his necessary book qualifications and to his continued opportunities for improvement while serving the library? And have we analyzed what these opportunities should be? We say frankly: First, the librarian is brother's keeper of all the assistants. Second, the educated library assistant in creating a love for books, owes as much to his fellow assistants, who have been less fortunate in the matter of education, as he does to the public. Third, that the library itself should become a progressive training school for love of books and reading.

It is the assistant who has caught the message of books, who has heard the gods calling him to celestial heights, who realizes what Robert Louis Stevenson expressed when he said that he felt like thanking God that he had a chance to earn his bread upon such joyful terms—it is such an assistant who makes the library a place where people want to read. And that is the true library whose books are read.

No one has a richer opportunity to be a public servant in all the fine significance of that word, than the assistant to the public in the public library. He may unlock the treasures of the past, for those treasures are committed unto him not for keeping but for sharing freely. This public servant may extend the knowledge of the discoveries and innovations of the present, and thus become an interpreter of the scholar's message. This public servant may match the answering book with

the inquiring mind, the responsive page with the hungry soul. This public servant may lead out the spirit of youth, lift the burdens of middle life, may speak solace to old age through the thoughts and songs of poet and prophet, dramatist and seer. This public servant must be a great personality, either an achieved personality, or a personality in the making; this public servant must be a lover of people, a lover of life, and therefore a lover of books.

The CHAIRMAN: The next paper on the program is by Miss EDITH TOBITT, librarian of the Omaha public library. Miss Tobitt herself, I regret to say, is detained, but she has sent her paper and it will be read by Mr. Frank K. Walter, of the New York state library school.

TYPE OF ASSISTANTS: ABILITY TO DISCERN QUALITY AND ESSENTIALS OF BOOKS AND POWER TO GIVE INFORMATION RATHER THAN ADVICE

When gathering the material for my part of this discussion of "Type of assistants," my inclination turned constantly to another wording of the title, that is, "the value of the book to the public dependent upon the intelligent discrimination of the assistant," so while I shall try to adhere more closely to the original subject than this would indicate, I hope that you will pardon me if I now and then talk on the second title.

"Efficiency in business" has received so much discussion of late that it is a brave person who dares assume the privilege of continuing the subject, but having seen the statement that "the more books of the right kind are read, the more efficient a nation becomes," a librarian naturally believes that the discussion has no end but may be continued indefinitely, for this means not only a supply of the right kind of books but also an efficient distribution of these books.

When speaking of the efficiency of the employees in a library, it would seem that

the same general rule would hold as in other occupations, but this is scarcely true. The people who are served by an institution maintained at public expense expect a higher grade of service than when served by the employees of some private institution or business. No doubt, this is because a higher grade of honor or integrity is expected in the occupant of the office which is maintained for the public good, at the public expense, than one which is maintained for private gain. Naturally the same general rules regarding adaptability, politeness, industry, and various other attributes should be applied to the occupant of any position but in the case of the public servant only the very highest standards should be tolerated.

Aside from the public the librarian's first interest should be in the employees of the library. Again and again the statement has been made to the effect that the "work of getting the right book to the right person falls upon the desk assistant chiefly," but as almost all of the employees of a library are desk assistants at some time during each day, it follows that all of the employees bear almost equal responsibility.

It would seem that the selection of books for the library should have first attention, but books are easy of selection compared to employees, and easily disposed of if not found to be useful, while the assistant must be carefully placed in the department for which she is the best fitted. For taking all of the valuable characteristics of all of the assistants into consideration, there are to be found as many grades of value as there are books in the library. To be able to do the subject of "the library assistant" justice, the writer should have a very thorough knowledge of human nature, a knowledge generally possessed by successful teachers and sociological workers, but not often by the librarian. Such knowledge comes from a kind of experience not easily obtained by a librarian. It is more to a librarian's credit to know thoroughly the members of the staff and consequently be

just to all than it is to have succeeded with any other one piece of work, because perfect justice toward employees will produce the best work for the library.

While the actual work of getting the right book to the right person may fall chiefly upon the desk assistant, the manner in which this is done emanates from those who decide the policy of the library. If those who are at the head of affairs have forgotten or have never realized that the library exists for the people, and that it is maintained at public expense for that purpose, and because of this lack of knowledge maintain an attitude of arrogance toward the people, the assistants will do the same. It is true that an indifferent and unsympathetic librarian cannot always prevent a capable and efficient assistant from doing her work well, yet the lack of efficiency at the head will often discourage capable assistants and will never better the work of poor ones.

In a library of medium size having thirty employees or less it is a comparatively easy matter for the librarian to keep in close touch with the work of the members of the staff and by personal effort maintain a definite standard, while in a large library this duty must of necessity be detailed to others. But whatever the means adopted, every library must have a definite standard of efficiency which bears directly upon the service to the public and although a full knowledge of the technical details of the work of the library are without question necessary, a proper knowledge of the right attitude toward the public is a greater necessity and should receive from the librarian much greater emphasis than the technical side.

The characteristic most to be desired in a library employee, in no matter what position, is that of the self-disciplined and well trained servant who understands the rights of others and what they should expect of him in his position, and who attempts to respond to this demand. These characteristics, if they exist, are inherent but may be more fully developed by experience.

It may be well to try to outline in a general way what should be expected of the occupants of some of the important positions in a library, for the final outcome of the work will depend upon the librarian's ability to discriminate in the selection of the right persons to fill these positions. For the children's librarian, the first requirement is a knowledge of children and the ability to feel and show sympathy and affection without being sentimental. Many attractions may be introduced into the children's department but the vital things are to know the children and the books. A mistake in the appointment to this position might be more nearly fatal than a mistake in any one of the other departments, for the ability of the children's librarian to discern intelligently those qualities in a book which are right for the child may permanently settle that child's taste in literature. The future well being of the library often depends upon the wise choice of the children's librarian.

A knowledge and love of people may also be put as the first requisite for the head of the circulation department, extending not only to the people who are generally called "the public" but also to the employees of the library. This position may well be considered the most important in the library, next to the librarian and assistant, for from this source the other employees will instinctively acquire the standard for their treatment of the public and obtain their ideas of what is the amount of knowledge of books which should be expected of a desk assistant. The personality of the head of the circulation department and her ability to be helpful and to teach those in her department to be helpful, can do more toward increasing the usefulness of a library than any other one characteristic. The employee given to much detail is not generally a success here. Rather that employee who, by strength of personality, leads others to do good work, is the best. The head of the circulation department has the best opportunity of any one in the

library for making a direct path from the borrower to the book.

Scholarship, without question, must be considered the first requirement for the reference librarian, and if the public is to learn to have confidence in the library as an educational institution, no mistake must be made here. But the scholarship must always be allied with the desire to do service.

Frequently the cataloger appears to the other members of the staff to be so far removed from direct contact with people that it is assumed she cannot intelligently know what the public wants. Except in very rare instances this is a mistake, as has been proved by some of our great catalogs, the makers of which probably rarely waited upon the public. It is the ability to put oneself in the place of the questioner, to have a sympathetic interest in the people, that counts, and also to realize seriously that only by means of the catalog can the public have a true knowledge of what is in the library.

The same general rules may be followed all through the library. Different positions require different qualifications and it rests with the librarian to see that the employee fits the position. If this is not done it will make little difference how good the collection of books may be, the contents of the library will not reach the public in a direct way. The library is what the librarian and assistants make it by their intelligent use of the material supplied.

This may all seem very commonplace. If it is, then why have we not profited more by what we already know? It must be granted that many libraries inherit employees who are not particularly well fitted for the place they are expected to fill. The only thing to do in this case is to put them where they will do the least harm. We cannot expect to maintain an all star cast, but by studying carefully the people in the employ of the library the librarian can generally so manipulate things that eventually the right person will be in the right place.

The program makers asked to have dis-

cussed "the ability to discern quality and essentials in books." For this we must have first the student and careful reader who, through the study of various subjects is able to judge the literature of those subjects. It cannot reasonably be expected that library employees will be able to have a first hand knowledge of all classes of literature, but all employees may become reasonably familiar with the names of the best writers on many subjects and the character of their work. It is by means of the various literary tools provided and the ability to acquire a more general knowledge of many subjects by much reading that the library employee increases in value. In this particular part of the work the library assistant gains more by much reading than she does by experience.

It is not my duty to discuss the kind or the extent of the education possessed by those who become library employees. We all agree that this should be the broadest and the most general possible with emphasis placed on literature and history. Most of our assistants enter the library training classes at the close of a high school course, and, generally speaking, librarians do not expect more than this because the salaries which are offered will not attract people of higher education. Therefore, if an assistant is to learn to discern quality and essentials in books some provision should be made by which this knowledge may be acquired in the library after entering as an employee. Just as the librarian is responsible for the attitude of the assistants toward the public so are the librarian and heads of departments responsible for the growth of the efficiency of the employees in this particular phase of library work.

A standard of efficiency must be maintained along this line of education as well as personal treatment of the public, therefore it is impossible to emphasize too strongly the necessity of continuing the education of the library employees after finishing the work of the training class and after having become an employee of the library. It can scarcely be considered

advisable to attempt to give much practice work in all departments to all employees but it should be one of the requirements of the library that provision be made whereby all of the employees in a department shall learn to know the general character and the value of most of the books in that department.

From the library periodicals of England one may gather that there is some rather severe criticism of the assistants in libraries, the general feeling being that a lack of efficiency deprives the public of their proper share of service. I should like to quote from a paper by Mr. John Bar, which appeared in the *Library world* (vol. 13).

"If the library would only adopt a policy whereby a guarantee could be had that the assistants in the library would be taught their profession in a thorough manner, I am positive that the now prevalent lament regarding the apathy and carelessness of assistants would be reduced to a vanishing point, because from observation, I believe that the assistant is the product of his environment; he is what the conditions in the library make him. The policy of the library should be to provide the staff with every opportunity for improvement in general, literary, and technical knowledge. In order to meet the first part of the proposal, the time of the staff should be so arranged as to allow a reasonable portion for private study as well as recreation. And in order to fulfil the latter part—that relating to technical knowledge—the work of the library should be so organized as to ensure that every assistant shall, in a series of progressive steps, obtain an adequate and thorough knowledge of all the practical details of librarianship."

The people of America cannot offer quite as severe criticism of their library employees as this would imply has been offered in England, but the suggestions regarding further education after entering the library, are such as we might well follow.

The second item suggested by the program makers reads "the power to give in-

formation rather than advice." This naturally would come through the ability of the employee to eliminate his own opinion and to put forward instead the opinions of those who are qualified to know. Here again the employee may, by much reading, become more efficient. There is nothing so offensive to patrons of a free institution as to have unsolicited opinions and advice offered by employees. And yet this is a characteristic of the new employee and is prompted not by conceit but by a desire to be helpful and to please. The best way to be helpful in a library, as elsewhere, is to help people to help themselves. In this as in all of the work of the library the standard must be that established by those highest in authority, and ways and methods must be put forward whereby the assistant may know what plan she is to follow.

The ability to be helpful comes by much experience, both personal experience and the experience of others. To quote, "experience is the force which makes life possible . . . and books alone give permanence to the facts of experience." Therefore to busy people in need of the experiences of others, the greatest help comes by much reading.

We may attempt in every way possible to make general rules governing the efficiency of the library staff, and attempt to maintain certain definite standards, both for the sake of the public and in order to keep down the expense of maintenance, but with all this we shall never be able to reach a perfect system, partly because many employees give promise of much, but soon reach the limit of their capacity and cease to grow, and also because of the frequent unavoidable changes.

There is some variance in the minds of librarians regarding the place of the library in a city, but without discussion we must all agree that first of all the free public library is a collection of books maintained for the use of the public. In order that these books may be available the employees must not only give efficient

service, but they must also have a clear understanding of the public.

It has been said many times that a few books in the hands of an intelligent and discriminating employee are of greater value than a large collection poorly handled. The employees constitute the medium by which the books reach the public and it rests with the buyer, the cataloger, the desk assistant, the reference librarian, and the children's librarian to see that these get into the hands of the right people at the right time. It is here that the careful discrimination of the librarian and assistants is necessary.

The average library is much too large to be well used by the public and the employees of the library. In most libraries of 100,000 volumes there are possibly not more than 10,000 which are of real value. If the employees could know the authors, titles, and something of the contents of most of these it is quite as much as may be expected. If the assistant comes to the library with a reasonably good education and something of a desire to add to what she has, and will read regularly of books which are of general interest there is no reason why she should not learn to discriminate quite as carefully in the selection of books for the individual borrower as the assistant who has made a special study of the criticism of literature.

No mention has been made of requirements for special positions in a library. This can only be settled after the employee has shown some fitness for special work. As the library is what the librarian and assistants make it, it rests with the librarian and those in the highest positions in the library to decide definitely on a policy, the result of which shall be prompt and efficient service from the time of the purchase of the books to their final distribution into the hands of the people.

The CHAIRMAN: Next upon the program occurs the paper, "The efficiency of the library staff and scientific management," by ADAM STROHM, assistant librarian Detroit public library.